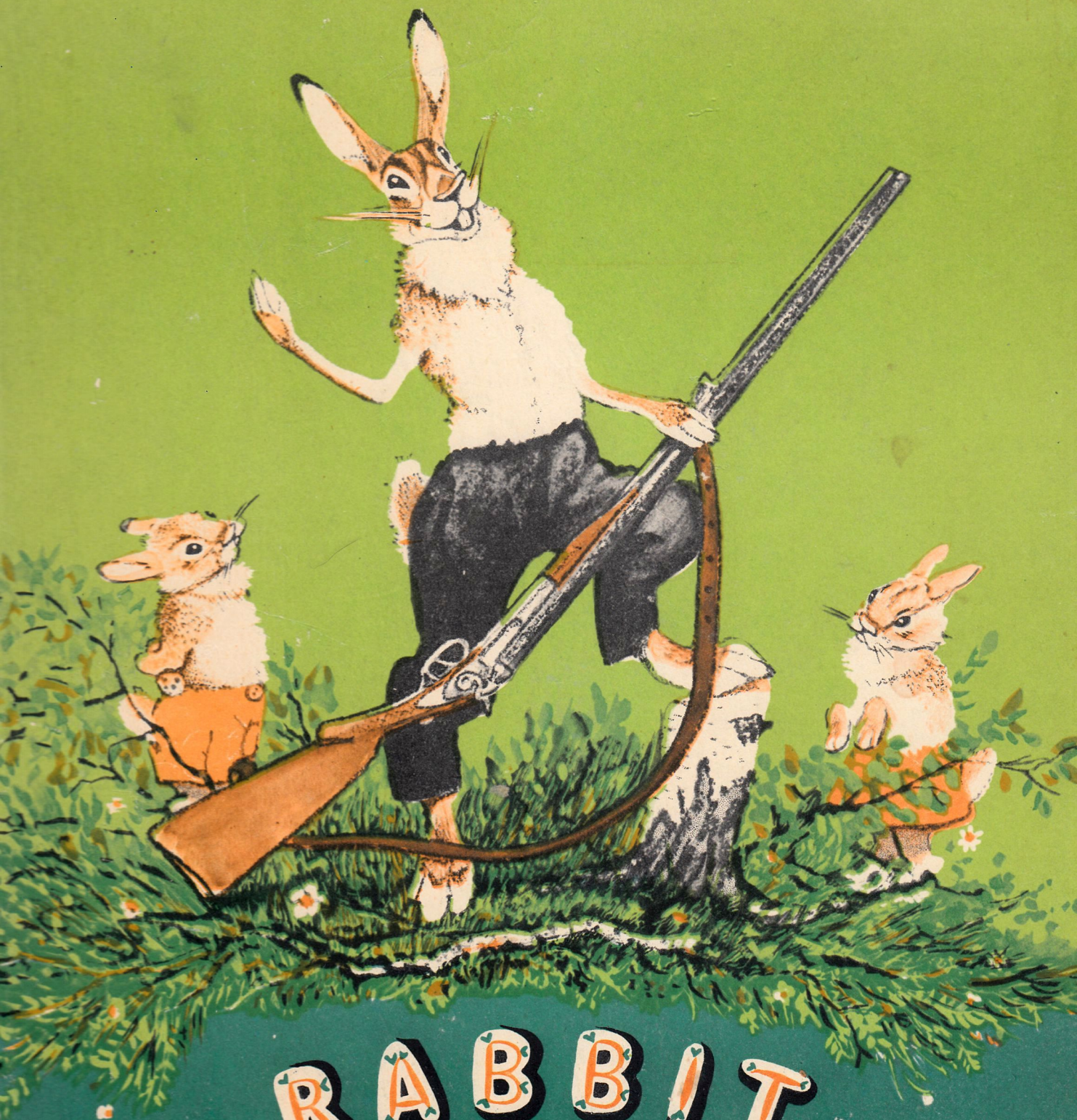


SERGEI MIKHALKOV



RABBIT
NOSE-IN-THE-AIR



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A FAIRY-TALE IN TWO ACTS AND A PROLOGUE

DRAWINGS BY E. RACHEV

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THE CHARACTERS

SORRY HUNTER
RABBIT-NOSE-IN-THE-AIR
WORRY-FURRY, HIS WIFE
PAPA WISE RABBIT
MAMMA WISE RABBIT
FIRST BUNNY
SECOND BUNNY
THIRD BUNNY
RED FOX
GREY WOLF





P R O L O G U E

It is a fine summer day, and the forest glade with its grassy knoll is sunny and warm. The morning dew has dried on the grass and on the two twin death-cups, their red caps very bright by the side of an old tree stump grown with thick green moss.

Red Fox appears in the glade. She sits back on her haunches and listens. The air throbs with the chirring of grasshoppers, the many-tuned voices of the song-birds and the cuckoo's monotonous call: "Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

RED FOX

I'm out of luck today. I've seen some of the dearest goslings and some of the sweetest ducklings and I set my heart on a nice fat chicken, but I dared not come near them. The dogs guarding that poultry-yard are terribly mean! I lay on my belly for two hours behind the sheds, and all for nothing! Got myself soaked in dew, too! Wish I could catch me a rabbit or something for dinner. (*The Fox smacks her lips hungrily. Pricks up her ears.*)

Something rustles in the bushes. *Rabbit Nose-in-the-Air* darts out into the glade. He sees the *Fox* and freezes to the spot in horror. In her astonishment, the *Fox*, too, stays very still, looking fixedly at *Nose-in-the-Air*. *Nose-in-the-Air* comes to his senses and bolts back into the bushes. The *Fox* rushes after him, but thinks better of it and hides behind a shrub.

RED FOX

I think I'll watch for him here, behind this bush. I know a rabbit's ways! He's sure to come running back to this very glade after a time, and that's when I'll catch him! I would be a poor fox indeed if I let a rabbit outwit me.

Red Fox crouches behind the bush and waits for *Nose-in-the-Air* to reappear. And *Nose-in-the-Air* circles the forest only to come scuttling back to the same spot again. He bounces out into the glade and sits back, straining his ears for a sound. The *Fox* is about to pounce upon him when something rustles in the bushes and *Wise Rabbit* appears. He tumbles head over heels down the knoll and comes to a stop beside his younger brother.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Hello, *Nose-in-the-Air*! Why are you trembling?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

The *Fox* is after me!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Don't be afraid. There're two of us and we're sure to out-wit her. I'll help you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What can you do?

PAPA WISE RABBIT

She'll see us and run after us...

RED FOX (*behind the bush*)

If I don't catch the first rabbit, I'll catch the second one!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

... and grasp all is lose all!

The *Fox* makes a dash at the two rabbits who take to their heels. The glade is deserted but for the grasshoppers chirring in the grass, the song-birds twittering and the cuckoo persistently calling "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

Suddenly there is a crackle of twigs beneath someone's feet, the bushes are pushed aside and *Sorry Hunter* strides out into the glade. A gun is slung over his shoulder and a hunting-bag is hanging at his side. He is singing a song.

SORRY HUNTER

With gun and bag through glen and grove,
Through forest, wood and field I rove,
A-hunting high, a-hunting low,
A-hunting do I go!



I aim, I fire, my gun goes "pop!"
I pray the birds would only stop.
But in reply I hear—"Good-bye!"
As fast away they fly.

I have no luck, but don't complain—
In spring or fall, in sun or rain,
A-hunting high, a-hunting low,
A-hunting do I go!

Bang-bang! I fire away,
I never waste a day!
And though no game I meet,
I'm always on my feet.

I scoff at heat and frost
And keep my fingers crossed,
I hunt and hunt in vain,
But always try again!

Sorry Hunter sits down on the stump. Heaves a sigh.

SORRY HUNTER

I don't think I've ever met with such bad luck before. Through mud and mire I waded, the neighbouring hills I raided, the thorns they pricked me, and the birds they tricked me, I'm ready to drop, I'm so knocked up, and all for nothing! I'll have to go home empty-handed again. If ever there was a sorry hunter, I am that hunter! (*Looks around him.*) A nice little glade! I don't believe there's a better one in the whole forest. I think I'll lie down and have a little nap. And then we'll see what we shall see.

Sorry Hunter leans his gun against the stump and settles himself on the ground. He lies down on his back, covers his face with his hat and soon begins to snore. Unseen to him, two rabbits tiptoe out into the glade from a growth of shrubs. They are *Nose-in-the-Air* and his wife *Worry-Furry*.



WORRY-FURRY

I simply can't get over it! I'm trembling all over. If it weren't for your brother you wouldn't be here now. You said yourself Red Fox almost caught you by the ears.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

"Almost" doesn't count! I can take care of myself.

WORRY-FURRY

Why must you brag! You'd never have escaped alive if it weren't for Wise Rabbit, and don't you forget it!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What do you know about it! Why, I...
I need no help for I
Am bold as I am sly!

WORRY-FURRY

Don't boast, I sadly fear
You'll come to grief, my dear!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I'll lead Red Fox a race
And land her in disgrace!

WORRY-FURRY

Hush now! The Fox is near,
And she might overhear!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Oh, nonsense, I don't care,
To touch me she won't dare!

WORRY-FURRY

My dear, Red Fox is slyer,
You mustn't play with fire!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I wish you'd go away,
You scold me night and day!

WORRY-FURRY

Now watch your manners, do,
I'm quite ashamed of you!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Look! Who's that?

WORRY-FURRY

That's a hunter and he's asleep. Let's get away from here
before we land in trouble!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Look! A gun!

WORRY-FURRY

Let's go, Nose-in-the-Air, what do you want with a gun?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Wait! Wait a minute! Don't you understand anything?

WORRY-FURRY

What's come over you, Nose-in-the-Air? You must be mad!
You only got away from the Fox by the skin of your teeth,
and now you want to go and be shot to death!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I know what I'm doing!

Nose-in-the-Air steps over the legs of the sleeping *Sorry Hunter*, stretches out a paw, snatches up the gun and is off in a flash with *Worry-Furry* on his heels. And *Sorry Hunter* turns over on the other side and begins to snore louder than ever.

C u r t a i n



A C T O N E

R

ed Fox's house in the forest. The house has a porch and a large window with carved shutters. Inside there is a bed with a mound of pillows, a Russian stove, a table by the window and the portraits of Grandpa Reynard and Grandma Vixen on the wall. *Red Fox* has donned a white apron and is bustling about in the room. She brushes the crumbs off the table with a duster of cock feathers and waits for the fire in the stove to get bigger so that she can boil some water. She is singing a song.

RED FOX

Today is quite a special day—
My birthday, friends, you see.
Grey Wolf is sure to come and pay
His compliments to me.

A nice fat chicken I will fry
And serve it on a tray,
With merry song Grey Wolf and I
Will finish off the day.

We two are friends, I'll have you know,
And I will not conceal—
Together he and I, we go
To plunder and to steal.

My birthday feast, I do declare,
Would please Grey Wolf no end,
If only I could catch a pair
Of rabbits for my friend!

The fire in the stove flares up. *Red Fox* puts a pot of water into the stove, takes off her apron, picks up her bag and steps out on to the porch.

RED FOX

I think I'll go behind the poultry-yard and hide in the nettles there. Perhaps I can catch a chicken napping and carry it off!

Red Fox slips the hook on the latch and trots off. Two rabbits edge out into the clearing. They are *Nose-in-the-Air* with the gun in his hands and, just behind him, *Worry-Furry* with a basket over her paw.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*turning to look back*)

What are you trailing behind for?

WORRY-FURRY

I don't like this, *Nose-in-the-Air*, I'm afraid things might turn out badly.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Are you going to nag again?

WORRY-FURRY

You never listen to anyone!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Why should I? I've got a good head of my own on my shoulders, haven't I!

WORRY-FURRY

One head's fine, but two are better.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

You and your fears! Stop trembling! You forget I have a gun. Be brave and follow me!

WORRY-FURRY

Oh, all right!

Nose-in-the-Air scrambles up the steps to the porch of *Red Fox*'s house and discovers that the door is not locked.



NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

No one's at home. All the better. There'll be less fuss.

Nose-in-the-Air lifts the latch and whisks inside over the threshold.

WORRY-FURRY

Well?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Come along! Don't be afraid!

Worry-Furry hops up the steps—hop! hop!—and into the house.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

This is where we're going to live from now on!

WORRY-FURRY

I smell a fox.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Let's open the window and air the room! (*He throws the window open.*)

WORRY-FURRY

How're we going to live here?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Never mind, you'll get used to it!

WORRY-FURRY (peeping into the stove)

She's put the water on the boil. Going to be back soon, I suppose.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Well, don't waste time. Put on Red Fox's apron and chop up some cabbage for soup.

Worry-Furry dons the apron, dips into her basket for a cabbage head and begins chopping it up for soup. *Nose-in-the-Air* walks up and down the room, looking appraisingly to all sides. Sees the portraits of Grandpa Reynard and Grandma Vixen on the wall, tears them down and throws them into the stove. Takes portraits of his own relatives out of the basket and hangs them up over the bed.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Now that looks much better!

WORRY-FURRY

Oh! Oh! Oh! Who has ever heard of a rabbit living in a foxhole?



NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

And who has ever heard of a rabbit roaming the woods with a gun? Tell me that!

WORRY-FURRY

Why can't we go on living as we always have, like all normal rabbits?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Because I don't want to live like them! Why should I? I'm stronger than anyone in the forest now! I got this gun and I chased Red Fox out of her house.

WORRY-FURRY

No, you didn't, not yet. She'll be back any minute.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Hee-hee-hee! Watch me tell her a thing or two!

WORRY-FURRY

Wait a minute! I think I hear someone coming. (*She cocks her ears.*)

Red Fox comes striding through the forest. She has a cock in her bag and is singing a song.

RED FOX

Though I really hate to brag,
There's a rooster in my bag.
And Grey Wolf, as I can tell,
Will enjoy him very well!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*listening*)

Red Fox! I'm going to give her a nice warm welcome!

WORRY-FURRY

I'm shaking like a leaf! What's going to happen now?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Move over. I need room if I'm to fire this gun!

Red Fox comes up to her house. Stops.

RED FOX

I wonder who opened my door?

Nose-in-the-Air appears on the porch with the gun concealed behind his back.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I did! Welcome home, Red Fox!

RED FOX

Look who's here! What are you doing here, Squint-Eyes?
Wasn't it you I nearly caught by the ears yesterday?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

That was yesterday! From now on you'll be the one to run from me!

RED FOX

We'll see! We'll see! (*Smacks her lips.*)

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What are you smacking your lips for?

RED FOX

Because I'm going to eat you up right now!

Red Fox rushes up on to the porch. *Nose-in-the-Air* raises his gun and takes aim.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Step back! Or I'll riddle you as full of holes as a sieve!

Startled, *Red Fox* draws back.

RED FOX

Where did you get that gun? Stop pointing it at me!

Nose-in-the-Air lowers the gun.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Properly scared, aren't you? Well, well! Who's afraid of who now?

RED FOX

What does this mean?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Just that we're here and we're going to stay here!

RED FOX

How can you do that? It's my house!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

It used to be, you mean.

RED FOX

But where am I going to live?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

That's your business!

RED FOX

But today's my birthday.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Many happy returns!

RED FOX

I've invited Grey Wolf to have dinner with me.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Well, you'll just have to apologize to him.

RED FOX (*sweetly*)

Do let me in, Nose-in-the-Air! We'll live in my house together. I promise never to touch you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I know what your promises are worth! You'd better go before I get good and mad. I can't waste time talking to you, I want my dinner. My cabbage soup'll get cold!

RED FOX

Oh, very well. You'll regret this, Lop-Ears!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Get away! Shoo! I'm not the least bit afraid of you!

Exit *Red Fox*. *Nose-in-the-Air* sits down on the porch, placing the gun between his paws. He starts singing a song.



NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

One, two, three—my count is done—
Here's a rabbit with a gun.
Suddenly a fox runs up,
And the rabbit aims—Pop! Pop!
Oh! Oh! Oh! The fox is dead,
He has shot her through the head!

WORRY-FURRY (*peeping out through the window*)

Has she gone?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Yes and so fast she forgot to cover up her tracks! There's no one in the forest stronger than me now. I can even chase the Wolf out of his den, if I so choose! And the Bear out of his lair! And ... and go to Africa to hunt lions afterwards!

WORRY-FURRY

I do hope everything turns out all right. You were so rude to her!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Rude? Hee-hee-hee! She ought to be grateful that I didn't shoot her on the spot! Hee-hee-hee! She'll know better next time than to try and frighten us rabbits!

WORRY-FURRY

The soup's ready. Let's eat.

Nose-in-the-Air comes inside the house, sits down at the table, takes a spoon.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

The magpie saw me carrying this gun, so everyone'll be sure to know by evening that we're living in Red Fox's house now. They'll burst with envy! Did you see how scared the Fox looked when I pointed the gun at her? Hee-hee-hee!



Nose-in-the-Air and *Worry-Furry* are sitting at the table and eating their cabbage soup with wooden spoons. *Papa Wise Rabbit*, *Mamma Wise Rabbit* and their two *Bunnies* emerge from the forest carrying gifts: a head of cabbage and a bunch of carrots.

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*in a whisper*)

Don't make a sound! (*He pricks up his ears.*)

FIRST BUNNY

I'm scared, Pop!

SECOND BUNNY

I'm scared, Mom!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

I'm scared myself!

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*sniffing the air*)

I think I smell a rabbit! We're safe! Come along, children!

Wise Rabbit goes up on to the porch. Raps at the door.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Who's there?

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Open the door! It's us!

WORRY-FURRY

It's Brother's voice!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

It's us! Open up!

WORRY-FURRY

It's Sister's voice!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Ah, so they've heard about us!

Nose-in-the-Air opens the door and lets in *Wise Rabbit* and his family.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Hello, Brother! Hello, Sister!

BUNNIES

Hello, Uncle! Hello, Auntie!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

I'm glad you got the gun, Brother! Good for you! Congratulations!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Thanks. That is, if you really mean it.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Where's the gun? May I look at it?

FIRST BUNNY

Look, Pop! Look! A gun!

SECOND BUNNY

Look, Mom! A gun!

WORRY-FURRY

Don't come near it!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

You mustn't touch the gun on any account!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Is it real?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Can't you see? Does it look like a toy?

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

How nice it is here! And what a lovely bed! Such soft pillows! (*Touches the pillows.*) Feathers and down!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

It's our bed now!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

What a cunning table! And such pretty little stools!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

They're our stools now!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Are you thinking of settling here for good?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I don't know. I may be moving to the Bear's lair for the winter.

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

And all the rabbits say that we're going to live together now because we only have one gun!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Who cares what they say! It's my gun and I will take it where I please!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Aren't you going to protect us?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

How did you live when I had no gun?

PAPA WISE RABBIT

You know how. You were with us then.

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

It was a sad life. We were always afraid that Red Fox might get us.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Well, I'm through with that kind of life. For good.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Oh, I see. Now that you have the gun you don't want to have anything to do with the rest of us! You were willing enough to share the bad, but not the good!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What do you expect me to do—keep guard over you with my gun?

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

Well, I never!



PAPA WISE RABBIT

What a way to behave, Nose-in-the-Air! If it was I who had the gun I'd never be so selfish. You think only of yourself. It's disgraceful!

The *Bunnies* start a scuffle on the floor.

FIRST BUNNY

He's nipped my ears, Mom!

SECOND BUNNY

He's biting me, Pop!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

Stop it, children, or I'll call the Fox!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Hush! Grey Wolf's coming!

The *Bunnies* stop fighting and fall silent. *Grey Wolf* is making his way through the forest to *Red Fox's* house, singing a song as he goes.

GREY WOLF

For breakfast at the start of day
I had a lamb that came my way.
He was a rather sturdy chap,
So after that I took a nap.
I lay beneath a shady lime
And slept till way past dinner-time.
I'm very late and hungry, too.
Dear Mistress Fox, forgive me, do!
I have a splendid appetite,
I'll eat whatever is in sight,
I'll swallow what you serve me whole—
Horns, hoofs, and tail, and skin, and all.
I'll eat a hare, a calf, a boar,
And when I finish, ask for more.
Forgive me, do, for being late,
I'm sorry that I made you wait!

Grey Wolf goes up to *Red Fox's* house. Stops.



GREY WOLF

I smell a rabbit! I do believe Red Fox has got up a rabbit dinner for me. How nice! I love broiled rabbit. Open the door, Red Fox! It's me, Grey Wolf!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*defiantly*)

Red Fox is not here! Go away, Grey Wolf!

GREY WOLF

What's this? A fox piping like a rabbit! How well she does it, too! Open the door, Mistress Fox!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

There's no fox here!

GREY WOLF

Who is, then?

FIRST BUNNY

We are, the rabbits!

GREY WOLF

Are there many of you?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Yes, and one of us has a gun!

GREY WOLF

Ho-ho-ho! I'll gobble up you rabbits and have your gun for dessert!

Grey Wolf starts breaking in the door. The *Bunnies* squeal, the lady rabbits tremble with fear and *Nose-in-the-Air* throws open the window, leans out of it with his gun and points it at *Grey Wolf*.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Let's see you do it!

At that moment a third *Bunny* bounces out of the forest into the glade. Seeing the *Wolf* trying to break into the house, he hides behind a tree, more dead than alive.

GREY WOLF (*to Nose-in-the-Air*)

Put down your gun, you!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I will not! Did you want one of us?

GREY WOLF

No. I want Red Fox. Stop pointing that gun at me, please!

Nose-in-the-Air lowers the gun.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Now you're talking! Red Fox is not here. She doesn't live here any more.

GREY WOLF

But she invited me to dinner today. It's her birthday.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I know, I know. She asked me to tell you that the party's off. Come next year at the same time.

GREY WOLF

Ugh! Don't think you will escape from me, Squint-Eyes!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

We'll see about that. You'd better go while the going's good! And you may thank me that I didn't take a crack at you. You'd have looked fine with a hole through your hide! Get away from here!

Grey Wolf turns and stumps slowly away into the forest. He keeps looking back and snapping his jaws. The *Third Bunny* scurries up on to the porch and drums away at the door.

THIRD BUNNY

Open up! Open up! Auntie! Uncle! Open up! It's me, your little nephew! Open the door, quick! I'm afraid Grey Wolf might eat me! Open the door!

Worry-Furry opens the door, lets in her nephew, hurriedly shuts the door after him.

THIRD BUNNY

Hello!

WORRY-FURRY

Hello!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*very glum*)

If this goes on, all the rabbits in this forest will be coming to our house. I won't know where to put my gun, we'll be so cramped.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Don't worry! They won't come! And we're leaving right now!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

Come, children!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Let's go!

Exit *Wise Rabbit* and his family. Only the *Third Bunny* is left behind. He sits shivering in a corner. As soon as they have left, *Nose-in-the-Air* smites his forehead with his paw as though remembering something. Hurries out on to the porch.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*loudly*)

Hey, you, come back!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

He's repented. Must be thoroughly ashamed of himself. I think we ought to go back.

The rabbits retrace their steps.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*to Wise Rabbit*)

Look here, I quite forgot! Bring me some fresh cabbage tomorrow morning. The more the better! I'm not going out for my food any more.

Wise Rabbit wants to reply, but is too overcome to speak.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

If you bring me cabbage every morning, I will tell Grey Wolf and Red Fox not to touch you.



PAPA WISE RABBIT (*spluttering in his indignation*)

Well, of all the

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Don't bother to thank me. As for the cabbage, I like it fresh. And please choose the largest heads. What you brought today doesn't deserve the name of cabbage!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

What a brazen fellow you are, Brother! I've never met a more shameless rabbit! We never had anyone to match you in our family. Who you take after, is beyond me.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Ha-ha-ha! You ought to thank me that I speak to you at all!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

For shame! For shame!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Well, if you won't, you won't. Suit yourselves! There's nothing more I can do. You'd better go.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

See that you don't regret this! It was I that got you out of trouble, wasn't it? And you never can tell what's in store for you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Oh, yes, I can. Get out and stay out!

The rabbits leave.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*under his breath*)

That wise brother of mine croaks like a crow! 'You never can tell what's in store for you!' I can, too! I know everything! (*To the Third Bunny.*) Why are you here? Why didn't you go with the rest?



THIRD BUNNY (*startled*)

Where can I go? Mummy and Daddy told me to spend the night with you, in Red Fox's house. They were planning to raid the vegetable gardens tonight and there was no one to leave me with.

WORRY-FURRY (*to Nose-in-the-Air*)

Let him stay for the night.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Oh, all right. You can sleep on the floor behind the stove.

THIRD BUNNY

Thank you.

The *Third Bunny* lies down on the bare floor behind the stove and *Nose-in-the-Air* gets into *Red Fox's* bed. He lies back on the pillows, covers himself with the quilt, yawns and stretches. He looks very snug and comfortable.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I'm sleepy!

WORRY-FURRY

Wouldn't it be terrible if Grey Wolf were to burst in here? Why, he'd gobble up all of us.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

You forget about the gun.

WORRY-FURRY

What if Red Fox climbs in through the window in the middle of the night?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

And the gun? (*Yawns.*)

WORRY-FURRY

Red Fox and Grey Wolf might get together and call Big Bear in to help. What will we do then?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

You're forgetting the gun. (*Yawns.*) And please let's not talk. I'm sleepy.

WORRY-FURRY

Why did you have to go and quarrel with your family? It's just too bad. You don't even know how to use the gun!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I know how to do everything!

Nose-in-the-Air turns over on his side and snores away. *Worry-Furry*, too, dozes off. And the *Bunny* behind the stove listens for a moment, gets up very quietly, takes the gun and looks it over.

C u r t a i n



A C T T W O

It is very quiet in the forest. Day is just breaking. All of the forest inhabitants are still asleep. *Red Fox's* house is wrapt in slumber—*Nose-in-the-Air* and *Worry-Furry* are sleeping peacefully. Something rustles in the bushes and *Papa Wise Rabbit* bolts out into the glade followed by the *Third Bunny*. They stop to shake the night dew off their fur.

THIRD BUNNY

The gun is not loaded, Uncle! I've seen it with my own eyes! I'm not lying, honestly I'm not!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Hm-m-m.... If what you say is true, then the gun's no better than an ordinary stick.

THIRD BUNNY

I swear it's true!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Hm-m-m.... *Nose-in-the-Air* is in a fine fix! You haven't told anyone but me about it, have you?

THIRD BUNNY

No! I haven't told a soul!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Hm-m-m.... You're sure the gun's not loaded, I suppose?

THIRD BUNNY

Yes. Quite sure.

Mamma Wise Rabbit and the two *Bunnies* dart out into the glade. *Mamma Wise Rabbit* is very tired and quite breathless.

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

They're still asleep? We must wake them up at once! Red Fox and Grey Wolf know about the gun already!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

How did they find out?

THIRD BUNNY

I didn't tell them, honestly I didn't.

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

The magpie told them. (*To the Third Bunny.*) When you're telling something you don't want anyone to overhear, you mustn't forget that the trees have ears. We've got to wake them before it's too late!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Of course. Though Nose-in-the-Air doesn't deserve it. That stuck-up little braggart!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

I know. He was terrible yesterday. But not to warn him now would be too cruel. Red Fox and Grey Wolf may be here any minute.

FIRST BUNNY

I'm scared, Mom!

SECOND BUNNY

I'm scared, Pop!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

I'm scared myself!

THIRD BUNNY (*to the First and the Second Bunnies*)

I found out that the gun is not loaded first, so there!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

We must hurry if we don't want to be too late!

The howling of a wolf suddenly sounds through the forest. The rabbits scatter in all directions, hiding behind bushes and trees. *Red Fox* comes out into the glade followed by *Grey Wolf*. They steal up to the *Fox's* house. Listen for a sound.

RED FOX (*in a sinister whisper*)

So the dear little rabbits are fast asleep!

GREY WOLF

Yes, and having pleasant dreams, ha-ha-ha!

RED FOX

S-sh.... Not so loud!

GREY WOLF

Wait till I get my hands on that rabbit. I'll make short work of him! I'll show him how to point his gun at me!

RED FOX

And I'll show him how to chase me out of my house!

GREY WOLF

I know what I'll do to him—I'll eat him up!

RED FOX

No, I'll do that!

GREY WOLF

If I could only get one good bite at him!

RED FOX

Oh, I'll leave a bite for you, Grey Wolf!

GREY WOLF

Mind it's a fat piece! I like the fat parts best.

RED FOX

And we'll divide Worry-Furry up between us.

GREY WOLF

All right! What are we waiting for?



RED FOX

Don't rush. We'll play a little joke on them first, pretend we don't know anything about the gun.

GREY WOLF

That's a good idea, Red Fox!

RED FOX

Of course it is! And now you hide behind the house and watch me. Come out when I call you!

GREY WOLF

Oh, all right, all right! I'm going to enjoy this! Of course, we could eat them up at once, but I don't mind having a little fun first.

RED FOX

We can always eat them up. The gun's not loaded.

GREY WOLF

What are we going to do if it is?

RED FOX

The magpie heard every word that foolish Bunny said to Wise Rabbit.

GREY WOLF

You can't trust a magpie too far!

RED FOX

Run and hide yourself. I'm going to wake them up, and then we'll see.

Grey Wolf conceals himself behind the house. *Red Fox* whisks up on to the porch and knocks at the door.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*sleepily*)

Who's there?

RED FOX (*very low*)

It's me, Red Fox!



NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What do you want?

RED FOX

I want to speak to you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Come over later! I'm sleepy!

RED FOX

I'm sorry to wake you, but I've come on business.

Nose in-the-Air goes up to the window. He has the gun in his paws. He yawns sleepily.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What kind of business?

RED FOX

There's something I want to ask of you!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What is it?

RED FOX

You mustn't be cross with me, *Nose-in-the-Air*! You won't be, will you? Promise!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*stretching*)

I promise.

RED FOX

You chased me out of my house, didn't you?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I did. So what?

RED FOX

Nothing. I can't do anything about it and, besides, I don't really mind. You're stronger than me, so the house is yours by rights. It's warm and there's plenty of light and the bed is nice and soft.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Yes. Very soft. I've had a good night's sleep.

RED FOX

I'm glad to hear it. I won't be sleeping in it any more, so it's a pleasure to have you enjoy it!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Why did you have to go and wake me so early, Red Fox? I'm very sleepy. (*Yawns.*) What do you want?

RED FOX

I want my things.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What things?

RED FOX

Mine. Give them to me, Nose-in-the-Air. You don't need them. You'll acquire your own in time.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I don't understand. What do you want me to give you?

RED FOX

Nothing very much. Just the portraits of my grandma and grandpa that were hanging on the wall.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I don't have them.

RED FOX

You don't?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

No. I threw them into the fire.

RED FOX

Oh! That's too bad!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I'm terribly sorry! If I knew you wanted them, I'd never have done that. Is there anything else?

RED FOX

Yes. I'd like to have my pillows back.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Oh, no! What'll I sleep on?

RED FOX

Well, can't you just give me one small one? When will I ever collect enough down for a pillow again?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Oh, all right. You can have it.

Nose-in-the-Air disappears inside the house. *Grey Wolf* peeps out from behind it.

GREY WOLF

Is it time?

RED FOX

No, wait! He's coming out himself.

Grey Wolf ducks behind the house again. *Nose-in-the-Air* opens the window and throws *Red Fox* a small pillow.

RED FOX

Thank you, *Nose-in-the-Air*. I'll never forget this.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I should hope not. We rabbits have kind hearts.

RED FOX

Not all of you, I'll wager! I hear you threw your relatives out of the house the other day, with night drawing on, too!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*crossly*)

Was there anything else you wanted?

RED FOX (*sweetly*)

No. Nothing else. Who am I to judge you? You know what to do!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

That's better.

RED FOX

Frankly, *Nose-in-the-Air*, I like you!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

You do?



RED FOX

You're clever and brave and sly. Many's the time I was after you, but you always managed to slip away! I've never seen a smarter rabbit!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*chuckling*)

Where do you get your ideas!

RED FOX

There's not a rabbit anywhere to compare with you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Don't I know it!

RED FOX

You're stronger than anyone in this whole forest!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Wait a minute. I'll just come out on to the porch. Then we can talk.

Nose-in-the-Air vanishes inside the house. *Grey Wolf* peeps out from behind it.

GREY WOLF

Well?

RED FOX

Not yet, not yet! Another moment!

Grey Wolf ducks behind the house. *Nose-in-the-Air* trips out on to the porch. He is holding his gun.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Well, Red Fox, I can't say that you're terribly clever or sly, but I like you, too. Let's be friends.

RED FOX

That would be nice!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Would you like to work for me?

RED FOX

Will you keep me very busy? What do you want me to do?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Nothing to talk about! You'll get up in the morning, draw some water from the well and sit down and rest. Then you'll bring in some wood and sweep the floor and sit down and rest. Then you'll set the table and wash the dishes and sit down and rest. Then you'll launder the linen and dig the beds in my vegetable garden and sit down and rest again. And that's all. You'll be sitting there resting all day long.

RED FOX

What will I get in return?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*after deliberation*)

A promise never to shoot you!

RED FOX

Good. That's settled. And have you any work for Grey Wolf to do?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I'll think of something. Oh, yes. He can guard my house. I'll put him on a chain like a watchdog.

Grey Wolf can hardly contain himself at the words. He gnashes his teeth and makes as if to pounce upon *Nose-in-the-Air*.

RED FOX

What will you give us to eat?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What would you like?

RED FOX

Rabbit!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Now, now!

RED FOX

I won't work for you unless you promise to give me fresh rabbit for dinner every day.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

That's enough! I don't care for such talk.

Red Fox steals closer and closer to *Nose-in-the-Air*. *Nose-in-the-Air* draws back, raises his gun and takes aim.

RED FOX

Well, *Nose-in-the-Air*, show me how your gun works.

Nose-in-the-Air presses the trigger, there's a click, but the gun does not go off! *Grey Wolf* vaults out from behind the house and up on to the porch.

GREY WOLF

Go on, shoot! I think I'm going to eat you up right now.

RED FOX

No, I'm going to eat him up!

GREY WOLF

No, you are not!

Nose-in-the-Air bolts into the house while *Grey Wolf* and *Red Fox* stand in each other's way in the door, arguing.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Help!

WORRY-FURRY

Help! Help!

Wise Rabbit and his family peep out from behind the bushes and trees, but hesitate to approach.

RED FOX

I'm going to eat up the rabbit!

GREY WOLF

No, I am!

RED FOX

It's my house!

GREY WOLF

But you invited me to dinner.

Grey Wolf and *Red Fox* burst into the house together. Hell breaks loose inside. Everything is turned topsy-turvy. The terrified squeals of *Nose-in-the-Air* and *Worry-Furry* mingle with the hungry howling of *Grey Wolf* and *Red Fox*. The gun flies out of the window and, as it lands on the grass, *Nose-in-the-Air* and *Worry-Furry* suddenly bound out, one after the other. This is the chance *Wise Rabbit* and his family have been waiting for. Without stopping to think, they rush to the house, slip the hook on the latch and close the shutters with a bang. *Grey Wolf* and *Red Fox* are trapped. They hammer



away at the window and try to burst the door open, but without success. As for our little braggart *Nose-in-the-Air* and his wife *Worry-Furry*, they sit huddled together on the ground, quaking with fear.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Good! Very good! Now they'll never get out!

GREY WOLF (*pitifully*)

Please open the door!

RED FOX (*pitifully*)

Please open the window!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Oh, no!... What shall we do with them?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Give 'em a good hiding!

WORRY-FURRY

Thank you, brother dear! Thank you, sister dear! Thank you, nephews! You saved our lives!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Don't mention it! We're always glad to help.

WORRY-FURRY (*to Nose-in-the-Air*)

If it weren't for them, we'd be lost!

GREY WOLF

What are you going to do with us?

RED FOX

What are you going to do with us?

PAPA WISE RABBIT

We'll put our heads together and decide. What are we going to do with them indeed?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I'd... I'd... I'd....

WORRY-FURRY

I wouldn't say anything if I were you. They'll decide this without you.



The *First Bunny* raises his paw.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

You have something to say? Speak up, kid!

FIRST BUNNY

We could starve them to death.

Grey Wolf and *Red Fox* howl out with fear. The *Second Bunny* raises his paw.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Well, what do you say?

SECOND BUNNY

Brother's right. Let's starve them to death.

Grey Wolf and *Red Fox* howl louder than ever. The *Third Bunny* raises his paw.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

And what do you propose?

THIRD BUNNY

I think we ought to shoot them!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

That's out of the question. The gun's not loaded. Where is it, by the way?

Nose-in-the-Air picks up the gun and hands it to *Papa Wise Rabbit*.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Here it is. I hate to even look at it.

Wise Rabbit takes the gun and examines it carefully. He opens the lock, peers into the barrels and discovers that the gun is loaded.

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*in surprise*)

What's this? The gun's loaded!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Wh... wh... what did you say?

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

Are you sure?

WORRY-FURRY

But it can't be!

BUNNIES

We want to see! We want to see!



PAPA WISE RABBIT

Go ahead and look!

All press round *Papa Wise Rabbit* to get a better look at the gun.

WORRY-FURRY

I don't know the first thing about guns!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

Nor I.

BUNNIES

It's loaded! It's loaded!

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*to the Third Bunny*)

What made you say it wasn't loaded? Where did you look to see?

THIRD BUNNY

Why, ugh... I looked in here, into these little holes. It was all dark inside.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

You little silly!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

But ... why didn't it go off?

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Because you hadn't cocked it, that's why.

WORRY-FURRY (*to Nose-in-the-Air*)

Now what did I tell you, stupid! Never try to do something you're not sure you can do in the first place.

Red Fox and *Grey Wolf* grow very quiet as they listen to the rabbits.

RED FOX (*tearfully*)

Have you decided what to do with us yet?

GREY WOLF (*gloomily*)

Hur-r-ry and decide!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I'd ... I'd ... I'd

WORRY-FURRY

I wouldn't say anything if I were you. They'll decide this without you!



PAPA WISE RABBIT (*to the other rabbits in a tone of command*)

You'd better step aside for the present. (*To Nose-in-the-Air.*)
And you stay!

The lady rabbits and the *Bunnies* move away. *Nose-in-the-Air* remains by *Papa Wise Rabbit's* side. He looks up at him miserably.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

You will now go up on to the porch and let the Fox and Wolf out. Understand?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*timidly*)

But why?

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Because I say so. Now go and do as you're told.

There's nothing to be done: orders are orders! Trembling with fear, *Nose-in-the-Air* whisks up on to the porch, lifts the latch hastily and, rolling head over heels down the stairs, hides behind a bush. *Wise Rabbit* stays where he was, holding the gun. He is waiting for *Red Fox* and *Grey Wolf* to appear.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

You can come out! The door is open!

The door creaks. *Red Fox* peeps out first.

RED FOX (*hesitantly*)

May we come out?

FIRST BUNNY

I'm scared, Pop!

SECOND BUNNY

I'm scared, Mom!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

I'm scared myself!

Grey Wolf follows *Red Fox* out of the house.

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*to Red Fox and Grey Wolf*)

Paws up!

RED FOX

Were you speaking to us?

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Paws up!



Red Fox and *Grey Wolf* steal out on to the porch. They raise their paws and stand waiting. The lady rabbits and the *Bunnies* keep very still. They are curious to see how it will all end.

FIRST BUNNY

Shoot, Pop!

SECOND BUNNY

Shoot, Pop!

THIRD BUNNY

Shoot, Uncle!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Don't bother me, children! Listen to me, *Red Fox*, and you, too, *Grey Wolf*.

RED FOX

We're listening!

GREY WOLF

We're listening!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

The gun is loaded! Is that clear?

RED FOX

Couldn't be clearer!

GREY WOLF (*to Red Fox*)

What did I tell you!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

There's a cartridge in every barrel and a charge in every cartridge. One and one make two. Two cartridges and two charges! And there are two of you! But I'm not going to shoot you.

RED FOX (*in a bolder tone*)

Some say it's loaded and some say it's not.

GREY WOLF

Ho-hum!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Not loaded, eh?

Wise Rabbit raises the gun and fires into the air.
Red Fox shivers and crouches down in fear. *Grey Wolf* stands erect, paws hanging limp.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Paws up! See that path?

RED FOX

Th... th... at path? Yes.

GREY WOLF

We see it.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

You will now go down the stairs and along that path. You will not stop until you reach a marsh where the frogs live. And that is where you are going to live, too. I don't ever want to see you in this forest again! Go! When you come out of the forest, you can drop your paws.

Red Fox and *Grey Wolf* stump down the steps and along the path with lifted paws, their tails between their legs. As soon as they disappear from view behind the trees, the lady rabbits and the *Bunnies* bound out into the open. They are very happy.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

You should've beaten 'em to a pulp, you should've...

WORRY-FURRY

I wouldn't say a word if I were you! We all know just how brave you are!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

All's well that ends well! *Grey Wolf* and *Red Fox* will never come back here any more. And it will teach some of us a lesson.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

You mean me, don't you?

PAPA WISE RABBIT

Some of us are not going to boast any more and put on airs. They're going to think about others for a change!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

You mean me, don't you?

WORRY-FURRY (*to Nose-in-the-Air*)

I wouldn't ask if I were you. It's perfectly clear just whom Wise Rabbit means. You'd better ask him to forgive you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I'm sorry! I promise to be good!

The *Bunnies* jump up and down in glee and squeal with joy. *Wise Rabbit* slings the gun over his shoulder and begins to sing a little song. The lady rabbits join in and *Nose-in-the-Air* sings with the rest.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

A hunter in a forest glade
Fell fast asleep one day.
A rabbit came upon him there
And took his gun away.

ALL

Away, away,
He took his gun away!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

This turned the rabbit's head, and he
To none the gun would give.
He drove the fox from out her house
And there began to live.

ALL

To live, to live,
He there began to live!

WORRY-FURRY

His friends all begged to see the gun,
But this was not to be.
Our rabbit told them with a smirk,
"The gun belongs to me!"



ALL

To me, to me,
The gun belongs to me!

BUNNIES

But when the fox came back again,
He shivered in his shoes—
The gun that he had boasted of
He knew not how to use!

ALL

To use, to use,
He knew not how to use!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

He would have met a dreadful fate
And perished in his prime,
But luckily the rabbits came
And saved him just in time.

ALL

In time, in time,
They saved him just in time!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

But now our friend has changed his ways,
He's good as he can be.
He says that he will never more
Disgrace his family.

ALL

Yes, yes! Yes, yes!
He's good as he can be,
We know that he will never more
Disgrace his family!

C u r t a i n

E N D



TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY I. ZHELEZNOVA

СЕРГЕЙ МИХАЛКОВ
ЗАЙКА-ЗАЗНАЙКА